

[North Carolina didn't vote for dirtier air](#) (Winston-Salem Journal – March 24, 2011)

We don't remember seeing "Dirty Air" or "Polluted Drinking Water" on the ballot last November, but some in [Congress](#) seem to think that's what the American people wanted when they cast their votes. There were a lot of things that North Carolinians and citizens across the country voted for in November — including a reinvigorated economy and reducing the federal deficit.

But now a majority in [Congress](#) — including some in North Carolina's delegation — seem to think we were also asking them to endanger our health by gutting the nation's core public-health and environmental programs. Rather than continuing to protect and clean up our air and water, they somehow got the impression we voted for more asthma attacks, more polluted drinking water supplies and more threats to our treasured national parks here in [North Carolina](#). Why else [U.S.](#) would the

[House of Representatives](#)

have used a must-pass federal-funding bill on Feb. 19 to launch what amounts to the largest assault on our health, clean air and clean water in recent history? The bill — H.R. 1, referred to as the "Continuing Resolution" — was a dangerous-enough attack on our health and environment when it was introduced. It threatened the health of North Carolina's children, elderly citizens and other vulnerable populations by blocking the

[Environmental Protection Agency](#)

from enforcing the Clean Air Act and cleaning up dangerous carbon-dioxide pollution from coal-fired power plants and

[oil refineries](#)

. Blocking these pollution limits means that global warming will continue unchecked, putting more of North Carolina's 738,160 asthma sufferers, including 211,000 children, further at risk of asthma attacks from global warming-induced smog pollution. And it threatened the drinking-water supplies of nearly five million North Carolinians by blocking the EPA's ability to restore Clean Water Act protections for the waterways that feed these drinking-water supplies. But rather than reject these and other attacks in the bill, the

[U.S. House](#)

then made the bill even worse. An amendment blocking the

[EPA](#)

from doing its job to cut toxic air pollution was adopted overwhelmingly, with the support of

[N.C.](#)

[Rep. Virginia Foxx](#)

. For example, mercury puts children at risk of learning disabilities, developmental disorders and lower IQs, and the

[EPA](#)

estimates that 1 in 6 women of childbearing age has enough mercury in her body to put her unborn child at risk should she become pregnant. An amendment blocking the

[EPA](#)

from treating toxic coal ash like the hazardous waste that it is was adopted as well, again with

the support of

[Rep. Foxx](#)

. Without stricter standards on coal ash, it will only be a matter of time before another toxic disaster occurs like the one that hit the community near

[Kingston](#)

,

[Tenn.](#)

in 2008, when one billion gallons of toxic coal ash spilled out of its holding pen and flooded roughly 85 acres of land. And while they were at it, the

[U.S. House](#)

even added an amendment blocking the

[EPA](#)

from updating air-quality standards for soot pollution — a pollutant that causes heart attacks and cuts short the lives of thousands of Americans each year. Despite the efforts of those who stood up for us North Carolinians and voted no, including

[Rep. Mel Watt](#)

, when the final votes were cast in, the

[U.S. House](#)

had passed a bill that amounts to the largest assault on the air we breathe and the water we drink in recent history. The bill reads like a wish list for the nation's polluters, with potentially devastating impacts for our health and environment. The only good thing to say about this bill is that it's not yet law, as it still has to go through the

[Senate](#)

and be signed by

[the president](#)

. But the polluters' lobbyists and their allies in

[Congress](#)

will be working to push it through anyway. For the sake of our health and environment, we strongly urge

[Sen. Kay Hagan](#)

and

[Sen. Richard Burr](#)

to side with North Carolinians and not the

[dirty energy lobbyists](#)

and reject this bill. There are many things North Carolinians voted for in November, but an all-out assault on our public health and environment wasn't one of them.